

usually referred to when speaking of Greek

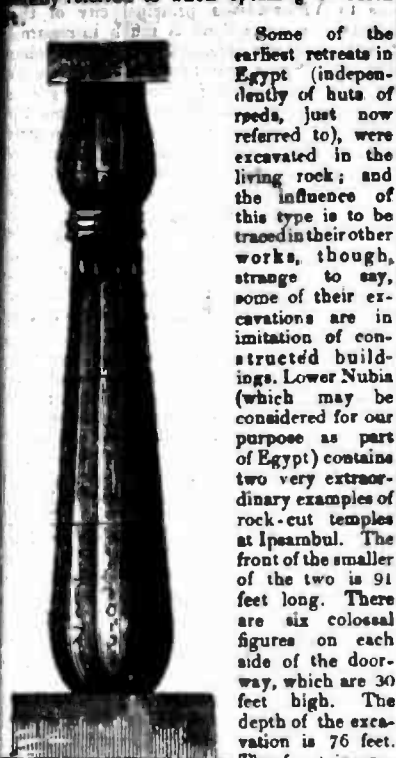


FIG. 12.

hieroglyphics, containing, amongst others, the name and title of Rhameses the Great, the *Basileus* of Herodotus. The oldest buildings remaining in Thebes are ascribed to his reign. It is quite possible that the temple in question may simply have been completed by him, as it has the characteristics of an earlier period of time than those believed to have been erected by him.



FIG. 13.—TOMB OF BENI-HASSAN.

In the sculptured front of this excavated temple we may observe the general character of the propylea. The larger temple contains some of the most gigantic specimens of ancient sculpture. It is excavated 154 feet in depth, and consists of fourteen chambers. The Pronaos, or hall, is divided into three aisles by two rows of pillars, with statues sculptured on the face of them, which support the roof. These figures are 30 feet high. Outside there are four colossal no less than 70 feet high. It is difficult to clear away the sand from ruins in Egypt; and this temple is seldom accessible: it is nearly the only one which has suffered from damp.

To transport and elevate the enormous stones (obelisks and other monoliths) raised in Egypt, required no ordinary skill. A proof of this is found in the *feldt* which attended M. Lebas, the French engineer, in 1836, when he removed the obelisk from Luxor to Paris, and elevated it on the *Place de la Concorde*. This was deemed an achievement, and, indeed, was so: it demanded great care, skill, and forethought. The operations were commenced in 1831, by

the destruction of a village to make way for it. Eight hundred men were occupied for three months in bringing it down to the Nile. It was conveyed across the Mediterranean, and deposited in Paris December, 1833. A pedestal was formed for it; an inclined plane built; 300 artillerymen with five capstans pulled it up the incline by a clever arrangement of ten masts, 70 feet high. It was pulled upright in two hours and a half, in October, 1836, and the king and all the people went to see it done. M. Lebas was "decorated," and received various appointments. He had the honour also of being caricatured as a rope-dancer, with the obelisk under his arm!

Now Egypt was actually covered, from one end to the other, with similarly gigantic monuments, so that efforts such as I have alluded to must have been of constant occurrence. Pliny speaks of raising one, when Rhameses caused his own son to be bound on the top of it to make the workmen careful. The colossal figure of Rhameses at the Memnonium weighed 886 tons!! And this was conveyed 120 miles overland. The Luxor obelisk weighs only 250 tons. To detach these enormous masses of stone from the bed, heat (amongst other agents) was resorted to. Often they drove wedges of wood, where they wished separation to be made, and then saturated them with water: the wood in swelling split the rock. In attempting to cut a block of Egyptian granite, our best steel tools are turned; thus the greatest difficulty was found in cutting into the Luxor obelisk when in Paris.

The temples and other buildings in Egypt were profusely adorned with paintings externally and internally. The columns and entablatures were painted, and the colours remain, in many instances, fresh as when first executed.

The amazing number of Egyptian works which still exist cannot fail to astonish every inquirer. Enormous remains are to be found on their original site; more lie buried in the sand; much has been used for modern constructions; and yet every large repository of antiquities, in England, Germany, Italy, France, contains numerous relics from this extraordinary land,—this country of mystery. In the British Museum the collection is of great interest, as you well know.

The chief characteristics of Egyptian architecture—massiveness, simplicity, and grandeur—may be ascribed conjointly to the influence exerted by their excavated structures, the materials at hand, the nature of the country which, from its scale, required corresponding size in any monument which was intended to command attention, and perhaps I should add the policy of their religious rulers, who sought by mysterious grandeur to overawe and influence their votaries.

The abiding influence of the first forms used by a people may be traced in all countries in their succeeding works; and in none more so than in Egypt, where so many of them were conventional,—religiously symbolical,—and remained stationary, not so much, says Quatremere de Quincy, because the people were unequal to greater perfection, but because the first efforts of imitation became objects of veneration, to be re-imitated, not surpassed. In their sculpture this is especially evident. It was the first mode of writing, and became the representative of certain religious facts and opinions. No alteration was permitted therefore, lest the signification should be lost. Plato introduces in a dialogue in 2nd book of *Laws* (quoted by Wilkinson) a remark which establishes this point. He says,—"The plan we have been laying down for the education of youth was known long ago to the Egyptians, that nothing but beautiful forms and fine music should be permitted to enter into the assemblies of young people. Having settled what those forms and what that music should be, they exhibited them in their temples; nor was it allowable for painters, or other imitative artists, to innovate or invent any forms different from what were established; nor lawful either in painting statuary, or any branches of music, to make any alterations: upon examination, therefore, you

will find that the pictures and statues made ten thousand years (?) ago, are in no one particular better or worse than what they now make."

Moreover, we learn that common or illiterate people were not allowed to exercise the profession of artist, lest they should attempt anything contrary to the laws regarding figures of the deities.

This enforced repetition accounts for the monotony which prevails in their monuments. When their skill had improved, they did not venture to go back to the original type, and copy nature, but continued to repeat their own first rude attempts. And this, by the way, in many cases is what we do at this time.

I will not endeavour to put before you any idea of the appearance which Thebes presented in her palmy days: where her isolated columns and statues, now above 3,000 years old, stand half buried, and wait to be overwhelmed,—enormous halls and temples, decorated profusely outside and in with colours and sculpture, upreared themselves amongst groves of sphinxes and obelisks; when her streets were filled with people, and the Nile was covered with vessels of all descriptions.

When we speak of a building above 3,000 years old, the mind is at first unable to appreciate so great a length of time, or to see the proportion it bears to the supposed age of the world: it cannot take itself immediately so far back into the past, but needs to reconsider and judge of it by some familiar standard. When this is done, no one can contemplate the amazing changes which have occurred since the erection of these buildings without the strongest emotions of interest. Countries now highest in civilization were then not known, while many which now hardly afford a resting-place for the birds, were flourishing and populous cities. Troy had not fallen; Homer was not born; and Solomon's Temple was not built. Rome, the Leviathan of ancient nations, arose, conquered the world, and passed away into a mere record of her former self, within the period during which these monuments have braved Time, Man, and the Elements.

I am getting serious, so will close my letter.

Believe me always yours,

Reggio.

NOTES OF AN ARCHITECT IN SPAIN.*

The Alcazar at Segovia is finely situated and picturesque, but with its sharp, pointed turrets, looks rather Frenchy. The state-room is magnificent, and the ceilings and friezes of others rich and remarkable. The principal or throne-room, is square on plan, with an octagon roof, which is canted off dome-wise. This dome is elaborately ornamented with a pseudo Arabic pattern, with gold flowers on a blue ground, the interspaces formed by the band of pattern being filled in with foliage. There are a series of broad friezes beneath the junction of wall, carrying the ornament gradually off on to the wall, which is papered with a dark, crimson colour: the whole effect is of an almost extravagantly rich description, the gilding being so profuse. The date of these rooms is about A.D. 1480, under Don Enrique; the style Gothic, adapted to Moorish sentiment; and the various examples, though too prodigal of gilding and ornament, are yet on an excellent system, and well deserving of imitation. One room has a kind of large frieze round it, with statues of the kings and queens: the costumes are very interesting. Another has a beautiful ceiling, consisting of a number of pendants in sunk panels: there are about 12 inches, I should say, between each pendant: this renders it confused, and the pattern becomes lost: they should be more charily used; still the effect is very excellent. The officers here, as at Toledo, were very polite (it is now a military college). Soldiers in Spain and priests in Italy are the great people: it is well therefore to propitiate them. From Segovia we were obliged to hire a sort of covered cart (*carriata*) to reach the highroad; arrived in the evening at a small village of some 300 labourers, and forced to remain there two days. This village, in the

* See page 184, ante.